Among the steps taken by the Central Government for smooth functioning of the Consumer Forums and quicker disposal of cases are:

(1) To strengthen the infrastructure of the Consumer Courts, Central Government has provided a one-time grant of Rupees sixty one crore and eighty lakhs to the State/UTs during the period 1995—99.

(2) Monitoring the working of the Consumer Courts through the National Commission.

(3) State/UT Governments have been requested to fill-up the vacancies of Members Presidents in various Consumer Forums on priority.

(4) Central Government is regularly taking up with State/UT Governments for ensuring the smooth functioning of the Consumer Forums and close monitoring of their performance.

(5) Amendment of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 from time to time.

Prices of Essential Commodities

140. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some programmes being implemented presently by Government to check rise in the prices of essential commodities have failed to the greater extent to have an effective impact;

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government are evolving certain short and long term measures to check rise in the prices of essential commodities; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The prices of almost all essential commodities have remained at reasonable levels since last one year and no shortages of any commodity have been reported so far.

(c) and (d) Government constantly maintain close watch on the prices of essential commodities and on their availability in the country. Apart from taking certain long term measures for augmenting the production of essential commodities in the country, import of items like pulses, edible oils etc. are allowed to augment their availability. The export of onion is being regulated through quantitative restrictions in order to keep the domestic prices under control. Essential commodities like rice, wheat, palmolein, sugar and kerosene are also being supplied through the outlets of public distribution system at below market prices. Stringent actions are being taken against hoarders, black marketeers and others indulging in unfair trade practices under the Essential Commodities Act and Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act by the State/UT Governments. Recently, the National Cooperative Consumers Federation of India Ltd. (NCCF), under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has launched a scheme called 'Sarvapriya Scheme', which envisages distribution of 11 selected commodities of daily use, namely arhar dal, gram dal, malka red, urad whole, salt, tea, toilet soaps, detergent cake, exercise notebooks, edible oils and toothpaste in suitable consumer packs through the existing public distribution system, the Consumer Cooperatives and the State Civil Supplies Corporations etc. at cheaper rates. The scheme does not involve any subsidy from the Government.